



# Early Civilizations of the Andes

## MAIN IDEA

**INTERACTION WITH ENVIRONMENT** In the Andes Mountains, various groups created flourishing civilizations.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Like the early Andean civilizations, people today must adapt to their environment in order to survive.

## TERMS & NAMES

- Chavín
- Moche
- Nazca

**SETTING THE STAGE** While civilizations were emerging in Mesoamerica, advanced societies were independently developing in South America. The early cultures of South America arose in a difficult environment, the rugged terrain of the Andes Mountains.

**TAKING NOTES**  
**Determining Main Ideas**  
Use a chart to record important information about early Andean civilizations.

Culture	Time Span	Location	Achievements
Chavín			
Nazca			
Moche			

## Societies Arise in the Andes

The Andes Mountains stretch about 4,500 miles down the western edge of South America, from Colombia in the north to Chile in the south. After the Himalayas in southern Asia, the Andes is the next highest mountain range in the world. The Andes has a number of peaks over 20,000 feet in elevation. South America’s first civilizations emerged in the northern Andes region, in Peru.

**Settlements on the Coastal Plain** Peru was a harsh place to develop a civilization. The Andes are steep and rocky, with generally poor soil. Ice and snow cover the highest elevations year-round. Overland travel often is difficult. The climate is also severe: hot and dry during the day, and often freezing at night.

Between the mountains and the Pacific Ocean lies a narrow coastal plain. Most of this plain is harsh desert where rain seldom falls. In some places, however, rivers cross the desert on their path from the mountains to the sea. It was in these river valleys that the first settlements occurred.

Between 3600 and 2500 B.C., people began to establish villages along the Pacific coast. These first inhabitants were hunter-gatherers who relied on seafood and small game for their survival. Around 3000 B.C., these people began to farm. By 1800 B.C., a number of thriving communities existed along the coast.

**The Chavín Period** The first influential civilization in South America arose not on the coast, however, but in the mountains. This culture, known as the **Chavín** (sha•VEEN), flourished from around 900 B.C. to 200 B.C. Archaeologists named the culture after a major ruin, Chavín de Huántar, in the northern highlands of Peru. This site features pyramids, plazas, and massive earthen mounds.

Chavín culture spread quickly across much of northern and central Peru. Archaeologists have found no evidence of political or economic organization within the culture. Thus, they conclude that the Chavín were primarily a religious civilization. Nevertheless, the spread of Chavín art styles and religious images—as seen in stone carving, pottery, and textiles—shows the powerful influence of

this culture. Ancient Peruvians may have visited Chavín temples to pay their respects. They then carried ideas back to their communities. The Chavín are believed to have established certain patterns that helped unify Andean culture and lay the foundation for later civilizations in Peru. Thus, like the Olmec in Mesoamerica, the Chavín may have acted as a “mother culture” in South America.

## Other Andean Civilizations Flourish

Around the time Chavín culture declined, other civilizations were emerging in Peru. First the Nazca and then the Moche (MO•chay) built societies that flourished in the Andes.

**Nazca Achievements** The **Nazca** culture flourished along the southern coast of Peru from around 200 B.C. to A.D. 600. This area is extremely dry. The Nazca developed extensive irrigation systems, including underground canals, that allowed them to farm the land. The Nazca are known for their beautiful textiles and pottery. Both feature images of animals and mythological beings. They are even more famous, however, for an extraordinary but puzzling set of creations known as the Nazca Lines. (See History in Depth on the next page.) **A**

**Moche Culture** Meanwhile, on the northern coast of Peru, another civilization was reaching great heights. This was the **Moche** culture, which lasted from about A.D. 100 to A.D. 700.

## History in Depth



### Headhunters

The striking images on their pottery indicate that the Nazca may have been headhunters. In numerous ceramic and textile designs, Nazca artisans depict the taking of human heads, probably from enemies in combat. Shown above is a shrunk head. Taking and displaying the head of an enemy was considered a way of increasing the strength and well-being of a community.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Contrasting

**A** How did the environment of the Andes region differ from that of much of Mesoamerica?



## Early Civilizations, 1200 B.C.–A.D. 700



The region in which the Olmec arose included lush forests. Numerous rivers in the region provided fertile farming land.



The environment of the Andes region was harsh. Its dry terrain made farming difficult, which the Nazca overcame through irrigation.



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- Place** Along what mountain range did the early South American civilizations arise?
- Human-Environment Interaction** What advantages did the Olmec have over the early civilizations of the Andes?



### Nazca Lines

Etched on the plains of southeastern Peru are more than 1,000 drawings of animals, plants, humans, and geometric shapes. Most of them are so large that they can be recognized only from the air. Scientists believe that the Nazca people made the drawings between 200 B.C. and A.D. 600. Since the lines were discovered in 1927, people have proposed many theories about their purpose, including the following:

- The Nazca people worshiped mountain or sky gods and created the drawings to please them.
- The lines indicated where surface water entered the plain and marked elevated land between ancient riverbeds.
- The lines are a huge map that marks the course of underground aquifers, or water sources. (This is the most recent theory.)

### Size of the Nazca Lines

Many of the Nazca drawings are huge. Some of the wedges (below) are more than 2,500 feet long. The hummingbird (right) is 165 feet long. The Nazca people probably created small model drawings and used math to reproduce them at such a vast scale.



### Durability of the Nazca Lines

This spider was created more than 1,000 years ago. It survived because the region has little erosion. The plains are one of the driest regions on earth with only 20 minutes of rain a year. Also, the ground is flat and stony, so wind rarely carries away the soil.



### Nazca Water Cult

Some scholars think the lines were linked to a Nazca water cult, or religion. The straight lines may have led to ceremonial sites. The animals may have been symbols. For example, according to traditional beliefs, the hummingbird (above) represents the mountain gods. The mountains were a main source of water.

### SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Visual Sources

- 1. Forming and Supporting Opinions** *Do you think the purpose of the Nazca lines had something to do with water? Why or why not?*
- 2. Evaluating Courses of Action** *What might be the next step for researchers who wish to prove or disprove the aquifer theory? What are potential positive and negative consequences of such an action?*



The Moche took advantage of the rivers that flowed from the Andes Mountains. They built impressive irrigation systems to water their wide range of crops, which included corn, beans, potatoes, squash, and peanuts. According to Peruvian archaeologist Walter Alva, the Moche enjoyed a variety of foods. These included both fish and game:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

The Moche enjoyed a diet rich in protein and probably better balanced than that of many modern Peruvians. Fish from the nearby Pacific were eaten fresh or sun dried. They ate Muscovy ducks and guinea pigs. To drink, there was potent *chicha*, a cloudy beverage fermented from corn that had been ground and boiled. Deer, now rare, were abundant. . . . Crayfish in irrigation ditches supplemented seafood from the coast.

WALTER ALVA, "Richest Unlooted Tomb of a Moche Lord," *National Geographic*

Moche tombs uncovered in the recent past have revealed a civilization with enormous wealth. Archaeologists have found beautiful jewelry crafted from gold, silver, and semiprecious stones. The Moche were also brilliant ceramic artists. They created pottery that depicted scenes from everyday life. Moche pots show doctors healing patients, women weaving cloth, and musicians playing instruments. They also show fierce soldiers armed with spears, leading enemy captives. Although the Moche never developed a written language, their pottery provides a wealth of detail about Moche life. **B**

Nevertheless, many questions about the Moche remain. Experts still do not fully understand Moche religious beliefs. Nor do they know why the Moche fell. Like many early cultures of the Americas, the Moche remain something of a mystery awaiting further archaeological discoveries.

Unlike the lands you will read about in the next chapter—which were unified by the spread of Islam—the Americas would remain a patchwork of separate civilizations until the early 16th century. Around that time, as you will read in Chapter 20, the Europeans would begin to arrive and bring dramatic and lasting changes to the American continents.

#### MAIN IDEA

##### Analyzing Issues

**B** How were archaeologists able to gain so much information about the Moche without the help of a written language?

#### SECTION

### 3

#### ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Chavín
- Nazca
- Moche

#### USING YOUR NOTES

2. What achievements, if any, did all three cultures share? Explain.

Culture	Time Span	Location	Achievements
Chavín			
Nazca			
Moche			

#### MAIN IDEAS

3. Why was Peru a difficult place for a civilization to develop?
4. How was the Chavín culture like the Olmec culture?
5. How did the Nazca deal with their dry environment?

#### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **HYPOTHESIZING** Would the Chavín culture have been more influential if it had arisen along the Peruvian coast?
7. **COMPARING** In which civilization did religion seem to play the most central role? Explain.
8. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** How did the Nazca and the Moche adapt to their environment in order to build flourishing societies? Give evidence.
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **INTERACTION WITH ENVIRONMENT** How did the Nazca change their environment to make it suitable for agriculture? Write an **expository essay** explaining their methods.

#### CONNECT TO TODAY MAKING A POSTER

Research recent findings on one of the three Andean cultures discussed in this section: Chavín, Nazca, or Moche. Then present your findings in a **poster** that will be displayed in the classroom.